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SUBJECT: CODEL ROHRABACHER EXPLORES FUTURE PATHS OF U.S.-RUSSIAN
SPACE COOPERATION

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Congressman Dana Rohrabacher discussed potential areas of U.S.-Russian space cooperation with Russian officials in Moscow May 30 to June 2. The Russians were receptive to the Congressman's proposals for a joint mission to the Moon. Energiya Space Corporation President Vitaliy Lopota suggested a joint mission to Mars instead of the Moon, and Rohrabacher agreed to study the costs and risks of such an endeavor. Russian officials shared the Congressman's concerns about the need to establish an international partnership to track, detect and divert "Near-Earth Objects" such as meteorites, asteroids and comets, from collisions with the Earth. Russian officials also raised with the Congressman the draft Framework Technology Safeguards Agreement, the Sea Launch program, and the use of the Soyuz spacecraft for travel to the International Space Station. END SUMMARY.

Planning a Moon Mission

12. (SBU) Congressman Rohrabacher discussed U.S. plans to establish a manned base on the Moon in separate meetings with Energiya Space Corporation President Vitaliy Lopota and Sergey Shishkarev, Chairman of the Duma Transport Committee and head of the Parliamentary Working Group on Aviation and Space. Noting that Russia had been a reliable and trustworthy lead partner on the International Space Station (ISS), Rohrabacher invited Russia to join the United States in establishing a joint base on the Moon. While the United States and Russia should play the lead role, other governments, such as the EU, could also participate in such an endeavor. Rohrabacher warned that China had its own Moon ambitions that were not necessarily in either Russia's or the United States' interests.

13. (SBU) Shishkarev agreed the United States and Russia should join forces for a Moon base, given the complexities of such an endeavor and the synergies that could be achieved by a meaningful partnership. Shishkarev noted that the partnership would need high-level political support on both sides to be successful.

14. (SBU) Rather than a moon mission, Energiya President Lopota felt that the United States and Russia could more effectively work together on a joint manned mission to Mars. Lopota proposed establishing within the next 15 years a manned orbiting presence around the Red Planet and robotic exploration of the surface. In Lopota's view, a Mars mission would be a more significant step forward in space science and exploration than establishing a manned Moon presence. After a manned Mars orbiting presence was established, Lopota suggested that the United States and Russia could plan a mission to the Moon from Mars.

15. (SBU) Rohrabacher stated that he would discuss a potential U.S.-Russian Moon partnership further with NASA Administrator Michael Griffin. He also said he would ask NASA to prepare a cost and risk assessment of a joint Mars mission and see how that cost-benefit analysis compared with a Moon mission.

Near-Earth Objects

16. (SBU) Rohrabacher proposed establishing an international partnership, led by the United States, Russia and possibly the EU, to detect and track "Near-Earth Objects" (e.g., asteroids, meteorites and comets), and to establish means for preventing collisions with the Earth. Both Lopota and Shishkarev welcomed such a partnership. Lopota shared the Congressman's concerns about the potentially devastating damage that such objects could inflict, noting the 1908 Tunguska comet impact in Siberia and the large asteroid that recently passed undetected between the Earth and Moon. The Russians also welcomed Rohrabacher's suggestions to work toward an international agreement on this subject and to hold an international conference in California, possibly on the margins of an already planned conference on space navigation at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena December 8-14, 2008.

Technology Safeguards Agreement

17. (SBU) During the meeting with Duma Deputy Shishkarev, Roscosmos Federal Space Agency International Department Deputy Director Sergey Rybkin passed a copy of the June 2007 draft Framework Technology Safeguards Agreement to Rohrabacher (FTSA). Rybkin noted that Roscosmos Director Anatoliy Perminov had discussed the FTSA with Rohrabacher on the margins of the Berlin Air Show on May 28. The Russians do not understand why the United States is proposing that the agreement only cover commercial, non-government spacecraft, launch vehicles and components. In Rybkin's view, the agreement's scope should be broad enough to cover the ISS and other government technology. Rohrabacher said he would look into the question of the FTSA's coverage when he returned to Washington.

Soyuz and Sea Launch

18. (SBU) Lopota briefed Rohrabacher on the safety and reliability of the Soyuz spacecraft for manned transport to and from the ISS. Lopota said the recent so-called "ballistic" return landings in Kazakhstan had been mischaracterized in the press. He noted that only four of the Soyuz's 122 flights had used a "ballistic" descent. Rohrabacher said his faith in the Soyuz's reliability had not been shaken, given the positive track record. Rohrabacher also discussed Sea Launch with Lopota and thanked Energiya for making the program a success. Rohrabacher invited Lopota to visit him during Lopota's next scheduled visit to Sea Launch's home port in Long Beach.

RUSSELL